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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

## *The Old and New Testament Student*

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NEW epochs bring to the church new opportunities. It is the mission of the student of the New Testament to see to it that such opportunities are not lost by a failure to discover in the teachings of Christ principles for the inspiration and the control of the needed effort. The function of the Christian ministry is to transmute religious instinct into moral motive by the exposition of Christian truth. So far as the ministry in the past has been true to this mission, it has influenced the world. If there has been any part of life for which the church has had no message, so far has its influence been lessened. The characteristic opportunity of today is furnished by the new and impressive prominence of social questions and social reforms. What share shall the student of the New Testament have in their discussion? Can he bring any aid to the solution of the questions and the accomplishment of the reforms?

THANKS to the propagation of extemporaneous social gospels, in the minds of many earnest Christians the word *social* is interchangeable with *socialistic* and even *anarchist*. Many of the objections felt against the study of Sociology by students for the ministry are due to a similar confusion. If the student of the New Testament as the guide of the religious community does nothing more than make clear

the distinction between these words, he has served well the cause of an aggressive Christianity. It is much to know that Christ often used the term Kingdom where we should say Society, and that he sought not merely regenerated individuals, but a Holy City.

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CHRISTIAN truth is of necessity a social force. The history of the last nineteen centuries has made this axiomatic. Christian teachers, it is true, have not always consciously undertaken to be social leaders, but the leaven of CHRISTIAN TRUTH the kingdom has been behind the elevation of woman, the emancipation of the slave, the abolition of branding, the better care of lunatics and prisoners, the destruction of religious vice. Back of the awakening human sympathy that so distinguishes the thought of today, lies the reiteration of the story of God's love, of the Golden Rule, of the teaching of man's brotherhood and God's fatherhood,—in a word, of the story of Jesus Christ. The need of today is simply that such Christian influence be exerted more avowedly and more scientifically.

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IN the way of preparing for such an application of New Testament teaching to special problems of today, two things are indispensable: (1) a knowledge of modern social science. Unless one has kept in touch with the latest thinking, this term means little. But in no department of investigation has there been more progress. The new problems that spring from the concentration of labor and capital, the maintenance of industrial peace, the settlement of industrial war, the duties of social classes to each other, the prevention and punishment of crime; these and a multitude of others are being solved today, not by glittering generalities but by the patient accumulation of facts, and by cautious induction. Sociology is no fad. It is a sober and persistent attempt to discover the laws underlying the association of men as a step in human progress. It is thus within the realm of Christian effort. For

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anyone who would apply Christianity to social ills to neglect its data and conclusions is as inexcusable as for a physician to neglect physiology and pathology. The New Testament teaching is as much for the Kingdom as for each of its subjects.

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(2) CHRISTIAN doctrine in its social application has suffered at the hands of foe and friend alike. He who declares Christianity mere other-worldliness is no more ignorant of New Testament teachings than is he who declares those teachings socialistic. Unfortunately the teacher of sociology is too often quite as ignorant of exegetical processes as is many a new-fledged reformer of economics and social science. Just at present it is fashionable to buttress sociological sentimentality—too often called “Christian Sociology”—with an uncritical and deluding citation of Scripture. The believer in the universal fatherhood of God—a truth undoubtedly to be found in the New Testament—sees no harm in appropriating to his own use the term “our Father,” regardless of its context and its content. The same is true of the expressions “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven,”—indeed, of any phrase or figure whose words are capable of lending the sanctity of religion to the crudity of theory. We lack yet an exhaustive and unprejudiced exegetical investigation of the social teachings of Christ and the apostles.

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WE protest against this abuse of Christian truth. There is no question that Christ’s teachings include those preëminently social, but such teachings are no more to be discovered by the blind use of a concordance than is a system of Biblical Theology. Indeed, if for nothing more than the deliverance of the New Testament from the hands of violent though well-meaning men, there is need of a Biblical Sociology, that shall do for Systematic Sociology what Biblical Theology is doing for Dogmatic Theology. If this is at present impracticable, the man who would substantiate his social evangel with New Testament teachings

should at any rate pause long enough to inquire whether the most elementary rules of interpretation permit him to apply the descriptions of believers in Christ to the world at large. Unless there be discrimination and understanding here, there is an end of the fundamental and the characteristic distinction of Christian doctrine—the unlikeness of the regenerate and the unregenerate character.

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ONE unfortunate element in this miscellaneous use of Scripture by its friends is in its inability to counteract the materialistic tendency given social science by its pioneer

*THE NEW*                    istic tendency given social science by its pioneer  
*FORM OF*                expounders. Sympathy, be it never so broad,  
*MATERIALISTIC*      cannot replace truth; how much less, then, can  
*THOUGHT NOT*        sentimentality? And truth must be the final court  
*OTHERWISE MET*      of appeal. If we cannot trust the New Testament's social teachings to stand when determined accurately, we may as well cease using them. In the long run, anti-Christian teachings are confounded, not by an accommodated gospel, but by the very gospel. Once let the real Christian conception of man and society be known and taught, and a godless sociology will follow a departing godless metaphysics. Few tasks more promising or fuller of possible influence upon modern thought await the student of the New Testament than the discovery of these genuine social teachings. In a singularly literal sense, men devoted to social study are eager for a new gospel of the kingdom. But they need the real gospel of Jesus the Christ and not that of some revolutionary Jesus Bar-abbas.

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WHO can furnish this social gospel of Christ if it be not the trained exegete? Few, indeed, are the teachers of sociology

*MOST*                    who have had any training in biblical science. To  
*SOCIOLOGISTS*        most of them even the fundamental formulas of  
*INDIFFERENT*        theology are unknown. Worse than this, to judge  
*TO EXEGESIS*        from their writings, few scientific authorities on social matters appear to care to determine exactly what a term or phrase was really intended by Christ or his apostles to mean. They prefer to read into the words of the gospel their own views,

however foreign they may be to the times or the body of teaching of the New Testament. The same man who ridicules the extravagances of verbal inspiration, sees no impropriety in drafting New Testament language into the service of some theory that will perish with the using. The same man who accepts gratefully the conclusions and analogies of biology, is apparently oblivious to the science of exegesis. Feeling the social dynamics of Christianity, he deems it unnecessary painful to discover what these mighty teachings really are.

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THUS an unscientific Christian zeal and an unchristian science that would use gospel terms need the results of New Testament study. But this is not all. More than commonly does the drift of social teachings of all sorts demand again the emphasis of the word of Jesus, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." In the noble zeal to improve the conditions of the poor there is an increasing danger that surroundings—environment—shall be regarded as omnipotent. Give the poor man a shorter working day, better food, better housing, better amusements, better sanitary fixings, and trust to evolution,—this is too often the gospel of social science. And at the same time none knows better than the sociologist that Utopias presuppose Utopians. The New Testament is not unique in teaching the importance of the individual character. But as a corrective for confidence in mere material improvement, the teachings of Jesus are unrivaled. As sociological theories too often attempt thus to improve the individual through society, so Christianity always seeks to improve society through the individual.

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BUT here many present day phenomena require the introduction of a *caveat*. To discover and formulate the social teachings of the New Testament is not to propound or champion any short cut to the Millineum. If Rome was not built in a day, much less will be the city of God. Jesus Christ was a champion of neither individualism or socialism,

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and the expounder of Christian truth may often find his clearest duty to consist in letting certain political and social ills and cures, severely alone. His concern is largely with principles. Exceptional circumstances will always demand exceptional action, but every man is not fitted to be a Parkhurst or a Booth. Intelligent interest in social questions and Christian teachings need not be prolific of amateur reformers in quest of ills to reform. To elevate and regenerate public opinion through the exposition of Christian truth is far more important in most sections of the United States today than to impeach magistrates and denounce classes.

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No line of investigation is more popular and destined to exert more widespread influence than that of sociology. It is yet in its formative stage, and is still capable of being  
*CONCLUSION* influenced by the social teachings of the New Testament. Over-zealous, though ill-informed, men seeing this, are misinterpreting and misapplying both social science and Christian truth. One great reason of this double misfortune is the lack of any clear presentation of the social teachings of the New Testament. This lack can not be supplied by the mere sociologist. It must be met by the exegete. Thus there comes to the student of the New Testament the opportunity of bringing the teachings of Christ into a new and most promising field, of influencing what is bound to become a great factor in producing a higher civilization. The duty here for every sane and earnest man is vast. Infidel France is the child of the anti-ecclesiastical philosophy of the eighteenth century and the unchurched Revolution of '89. In a few years the possibility of making Christian truth a great part of a social philosophy may have passed, new social conditions may have become set, the greatest opportunity opened to the church for centuries may have been lost, the day of inspiration and direction may have given place to that of opposition and contempt.